

## **2006-17-Bonus**

### **The End of the World as we Know it**

#### **Introduction:**

The last week of the trimester at the University of New Haven just ended and with it my terrorism course. This course is particularly interesting and fun for the students because it is essentially a strategic scenario simulation that is built up from the students with some guidance and facilitation from their professor (me). This special bonus edition is about the game we had this trimester.

#### **Background**

Between the first weekend of the scenario simulation and the follow-on weekend, I was in the Washington DC area participating in a strategic scenario simulation with a group of top flight folks. This was being done for the US Department of Homeland Security to examine what an evil genius might do to attack the United States. The material gathered from my class on the first weekend was brought to the meetings in DC and it ended up that several of the student scenarios ended up ranked very highly as well within the capabilities of any terrorist group, feasible, and having serious potential consequences to the US.

The scenario I played out in more detail with my class reflects a variation on one of these highly ranked scenarios and is intended to bring out the defenses that might be reasonable for the US to put in place. However, no confidential information from the DC meetings was used in the class and all of the outcomes that I will describe are based only on the class discussions and not in any way related to any knowledge I have of anything the US government does or does not do. Any likeness between our results and reality is purely coincidental.

#### **Mechanics**

Functionally, these scenario simulations are designed to bring about specific understandings of specific issues and, as such, they are "played" out as a series of moves. Moves are time constrained and don't have much information or specific details. The person running the scenarios acts as the intelligence arm of the participants and answers questions realistically as would an intelligence arm of their organization but without providing further relevant information that alters the operation of the scenarios. The scenarios are not adaptive at game time.

#### **Scene 1: Oct 26, 2006**

##### **School bus bombs go off:**

- Dallas, TX (30 die – 29 children)
- San Diego, CA (3 drivers die – an hour early)
- Salt Lake City and Denver bombs fail and found
- School districts are mostly Mexican/American
- Parents demand school bus safety
- 60% of dead are Mexican origin
- No ID of perpetrator(s)
- Common materials used in bombs
- Parents are very worried about Halloween
- Claims of responsibility by many groups from ALF to Zapatistas, most disclaimed as usual

The class is told they are the top-level group at DHS and are tasked with deciding what to do immediately, tactically, and strategically. The incident happened less than 15 minutes ago and you have one hour before the President goes on TV with your group leader standing next to him. The class only had enough time to come up with immediate actions:

- Quell fears by press release advising public of what is being done (increased security).
- Engage the public in helping to find perpetrators and provide a tip and lead line with an 800 number and a Web tips site).
- Go to orange alert in select sectors.
- State what federal resources are brought in.
- Issue a Halloween caution asking parents to use good judgment and suggesting that they celebrate at home.
- Create command centers near damage points.
- Get input from DHS agencies.
- Alert border patrol of possible exodus, violence, and riots associated with the apparent Mexican American linkage and border tensions.
- Send the ATF to affected locations.
- Send field agent to each site.
- Increase surveillance efforts against all known groups and possible suspects.
- Ask the state governors to assign National Guard troops to local school bus barns and schools in affected cities in 4 states.
- Urge other governors to increase vigilance.
- Ask local officials to position police with each school bus in the 4 cities
- Search each bus before each route and attend then 24x7 nationwide.
- The FBI will take the lead in tracking the perpetrators down.

After the meeting, a member of the class briefs this out and we go on to the next move...

**Scene 2: Nov 2, 2006****Halloween was event free:**

- A big national sigh of relief was given.
- Many parents are driving to school in car pools.

**2PM EST: Bombs go off in schools:**

- 25 child casualties in Hudson, OH school.
- Instant national evacuation saves kids in Miami FL school when bomb goes off 5 minutes later.
- Failed bombs found in Cleveland, OH and Kansas City, KS schools.
- Parents nationwide rush from work to get kids.
- Demands that schools stay closed until they can be truly secured.
- No ID of perpetrator(s).
- Media is pushing terrorism button very heavily.
  - “Schools in Crisis” and “Dead Babies” special reports are on major networks.
  - The Mexican connection is seemingly refuted – or so the media starts to claim.
  - Or was it retribution?!? The pundits are going wild with speculation.
- All the usual claims and denials...

The class has an hour to come up with their move...

- Immediate
  - Try to quell fears by announcing what is now being done and claiming previous security measures worked (they know this PR won't work for everyone but it still has to be done).
  - Close all schools nationwide till Monday to give time to search and secure them all.
  - Send DHS teams to the new locations.
  - Stop police following school buses
- Tactical:
  - Increase school security with parental patrols 24x7 carrying cell phones and going in pairs.
  - Give training via the media to parent patrols so they know how to spot suspicious objects and search buildings.
  - While schools are closed do sweeps of schools using newly trained parent teams.
  - By Monday school ID cards issued to all who are to have access to any school nationwide.
  - The President meets state governors over the weekend to coordinate.
  - Create Web, video, and paper items to train teachers, students, and parents on spotting bombs and reporting them.
- Strategic:
  - Add fences and metal detectors to schools not already having them.
  - Secure day cares and other places kids congregate; arcades, play grounds, community centers, and so forth.

**Internet bomb threats:**

- Bomb threats are sent to school supervisors in KY, CT, TX, NY, FL, CO, AZ, IO, NC, PA, VA, GA, WI, and IL.
- They arrive at or about 6AM Eastern time
- They come from a spambot in a Canadian corporation and are otherwise untraceable for now.
- The DHS group gets the news at 6:15 AM from their national alert center that intercepted the messages as they transited the Web.
- Telephone-based coordination of key players starts at 6:30 AM
- You have 30 minutes before schools open and buses are already on the road.

Only an immediate move is desired here and the team only gets 30 minutes:

- Alert the media to get the message out to parents
- Advise cancellation of schools in those states.
- Parents in the East coast states are told to pick up their children at designated locations, usually community centers. In other states school closings use existing infrastructure like they would on a bad weather day.
- Schools do additional sweeps to make sure they are secure.
- No indication that the emails are true but to not advise school closures and have a bomb go off would be worse than shutting them down.
- Polling places will remain open and are secured with the public message asking people to please vote as a patriotic gesture and to prove to the terrorists that we are truly the land of the free and the home of the brave – vote in record numbers

The discussion identified that the emails were probably hoaxes and directed at states where congressional seat turnovers from republican to democrat were in question. The question was then what to do about it. The response was to make the children safe by holding them at home and to make certain the election proceeded regardless of any local consequences.

It was unclear whether this would help democrats or republicans or whether there would be more or less turnout, but the notion of canceling or extending election day was rapidly taken off the table.

**Mini-Scene 3: Nov 7, 2006 – Election day**

**Scene 4: Nov 24, 2006****The day after thanksgiving:**

No bombs went off on election day, but:

- Many Republican seats were lost in the election
- Parties are filing law suits over the election.
- Government asserts it has heard nothing from the bombers since the election at all.
- Public officials are expressing confidence in new measures to protect schools and buses nationwide.

**Then at 2PM Eastern, 11AM Pacific:**

- Bombs go off at malls at:
  - Great Mall (San Jose, CA)
  - Central Park Mall (Fredricksburg, VA)
  - Tyson's Corners Center (DC)
  - Scottsdale Fashion Center (AZ)
  - Mall of America (Bloomington, MN)
- All with shrapnel and fine white powder.
- All at main and secondary entrances.

At this point, the class abandoned all hope of limited response and moved toward direct control:

- Immediate:
  - Notify governors of affected states to seal these malls and quarantine them keeping people inside until decontamination can take place.
  - Notify health care centers of the emergency.
  - Search mall areas nationwide for devices.
  - CDC, FEMA, local agencies, child services (family parents in malls), etc. are all engaged.
  - Media notices are given to stay away from malls in those areas and stay at home.
  - HazMat crews are sent in for decontamination
  - HVAC is turned off at malls to limit spread

At this point a presumptive test was indicated as positive for Anthrax – not definitive but enough to act:

- Governors are advised to Declare Martial law in those cities and to seal those cities.
- DoD assistance is requested for countering the possible biological threat and for analysis.
- Preparations are mad for vaccine deployment
- Malls are told to enhance security nationwide and to look for similar packages, powder, and suspicious looking people.
- Emergency warnings are issued and the national threat level is set to Red in all areas.
- Tactical
  - Arrest all known domestic terror suspects.
  - Get emergency search warrants search all of their homes, lands, etc. for any evidence.
  - National IDs are immediately mandated for all persons and anyone without one is subject to immediate arrest and indefinite holding.

The students thought that security outweighed freedoms.

**Scene 5: July 1, 2006****We are back to today**

Knowing what you know now, what would you do differently today?

Here the students shine. They created two alternative approaches and titled them as follows:

**1984:**

The 1984 approach sacrifices freedoms and privacy for safety by using massive covert surveillance programs to detect, correlate, and interdict. These include:

- Patriotism is expressed as being a team player and yielding your freedom for the benefit of all.
- Collect all financial transaction, telephone call, transportation tickets, and related data.
- Force national ID cards with RFID tags and track all movement of people nationwide.
- Place surveillance cameras and record and retain acts in public places for at least a week.
- Place RFID tags on products and tagents in chemicals to allow tracking of all of them wherever they go or if found in an investigation.
- Analyze the combined data for correlations to find groups of people that meet and then travel to places, buy components that could be assembled into harmful devices,
- Use analytical capabilities in terror investigation to rapidly find and secure perpetrators.

**1776:**

The 1776 approach sacrifices some safety for freedoms and privacy and places control and responsibility in local hands:

- Patriotism becomes standing up to the terrorists and standing on your own, free and stoic.
  - We can take it
  - Get government off our backs
  - Personal responsibility
  - Fearless self-reliance
  - Local control and independence
- Local communities set up their own methods for detecting strangers and protecting themselves from them.

**And common ground:**

The class voted on the previous approaches and voted 6 to 1 in favor of the 1776 approach.

They also identified that more strategic simulation would be helpful in preparing plans and checklists for contingencies, learning to work together and coordinate better, and identify that such activities are a key component of effective homeland security programs.

## Commentary

This scenario is a version of a day after game. Its design is intended to create a sequence of actions that stress specific problem areas and to give players a set of decisions to be made in a group followed by the opportunity to rethink the original approach they took to the issues at hand after going through the experience. This class had devised a set of defenses over the previous week after participating in the initial part of the class where they came to understand threats and the sorts of attacks that could be used. I did not know of their defenses in advance.

These sorts of scenario simulations (I prefer the term *game* but *table-top exercise* or *strategic scenario simulation* seem to be more acceptable to those who fund them) are useful for a wide range of activities and are commonly used in the Federal government and elsewhere. They are advised as part of the ISO 17799 standard for doing disaster recovery and business continuity planning, and they are useful for bringing out and generating lots of ideas. They are not a substitute for in-depth analysis, but rather an enhancement of it.

The most interesting thing about this game was the day after outcome. Given recent media revelations about classified US government counter-terrorism programs, it seems likely that the 1984 approach is in fact being used by the US government. They likely have surveillance programs covering all transactions involving sensitive components that may be used to form bombs (e.g., fuel oil and fertilizer) and the ability to correlate these across groups of individuals making purchases who also communicate with each other (e.g., via telephone calls using the domestic phone group analysis and Internet using a similar email address analysis, and so forth. So-called crime mapping is almost certainly being used to do link analysis and search out likely terrorists before they act as well as after evidence is found. If a graduate class in our National Security program can figure this out (they also indicated that the program has to be classified to prevent being avoided and to prevent a public outcry), certainly the US government can do so as can any reasonably good terrorist group or their state sponsor (if they have one).

“Always look on the bright side of life”!

## Service Summary

Every month we feature one of our services and give an example of how it benefited one of our clients. This bonus issue discusses our strategic scenario programs.

Strategic games like the one discussed in this special bonus issue have been part of our practice for many years. We like to play them as well as to run them, and we have run quite a few of them for groups of different sorts and sizes. The nature of such exercises has been demonstrated above. But there are some key limitations to be considered:

### Context bounded

These games make assumptions that limit the space explored and the exploration methods. Often breadth instead of depth is generated.

Ten people in a room for an hour can't do the same things that one person in a room for ten hours can do; they lack deep analysis.

### A human activity

This sort of game is not automatable today of for the foreseeable future.

Outcomes are closely linked to motives of the participants and their knowledge.

### Group theory applies here

Results are heavily tied to group dynamics, group size, selection, expertise, and experience, and outcomes can be easily manipulated by a skilled game director.

Despite the limitations, strategic scenario simulations are very useful for educating the participants, for strategy development, and for forming more effective execution of plans in real situations. Practice makes perfect.

### *Would you like to play a game?*

Call for further information.

### *Mollie gets the last word in*

You have to know that a group of young people will, at first go for the massive technology program to save them from the evildoers. But this group thought through it and decided that they wanted freedom from their government more than safety from terrorists. Maybe my generation can take it after all!